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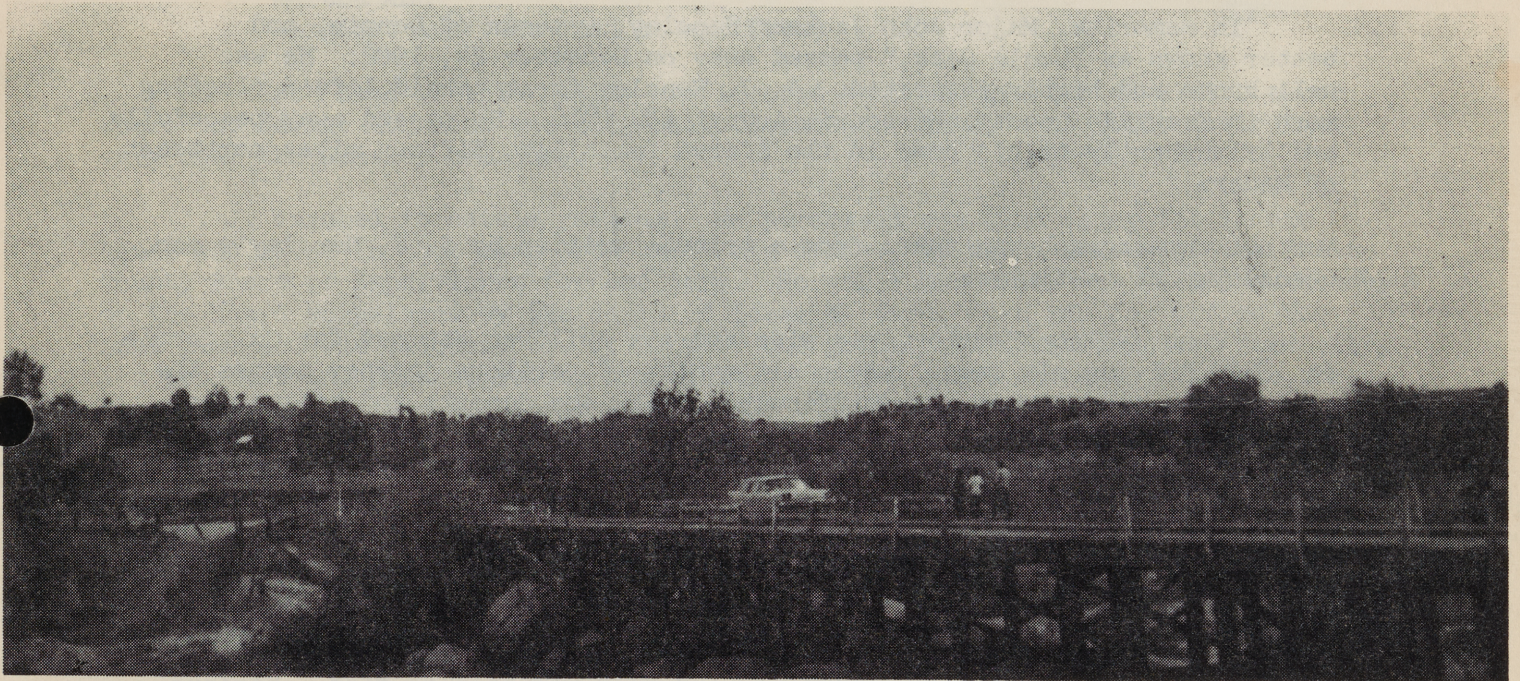
# THE MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN

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MADERA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY

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HENSLEY BRIDGE

## THE HENSLEYS

by Maud Lindemann, Curator M.C.H.S.



## THE HENSLEYS

In the early summer of 1972, construction began on the two dams which will mean much to Madera County. Both dams will be located in historic areas of early Madera County - "Buchanan" and "Hidden Reservoir."

Our story for this issue will be confined to the Fresno River, in and around the area where the Savage Monument and the old Adobe Store were located, about 17 miles from the City of Madera. We will also tell of some of the early settlers in that area, particularly the Hensley family.

In scanning an old scrap book, we discovered the obituary of John Jackson Hensley, the first Hensley to come to Madera County:

"In memoriam, Major John Jackson Hensley, veteran of Dennis, and better known as "Uncle Jack," passed away on December 24, 1902. He was well known and highly respected. J. J. Hensley first beheld life's fleeting morn in Franklin County, Missouri, August 18, 1816. He passed away peacefully and triumphantly at his home in the Sierra foothills, fifteen miles northeast of Madera."

The above paragraph was taken from a tribute written by J. J. Hensley's son, A. H. Hensley. It continues:

"John Jackson Hensley, his wife and six children set out for California in 1853, driving six oxen. After six months of perilous journey across the plains, crossing rivers with difficulty, trackless deserts and encounters with hostile Indians, they arrived safely at Volcano, California, in September 1853. They traveled the northern route via Salt Lake City to the Humboldt River, and on to Amador County."

Since many of our readers may not know just where Volcano is, we will include just a brief description.

Volcano is in Amador County, and when J. J. Hensley and family arrived in 1853, it was a very busy little settlement, and gold was easy to find. Various methods were used, but hydraulic mining began early there. A very fine story about Volcano, written by Irvin Engle, was published in the Pacific Historian, Vol. 16, No. 4, Winter 1972.

Apparently the Hensleys did not "strike it rich," as they left in 1859 and settled in Tulare County until 1862, when again they turned to the gold fields and on their way, camped on the south bank of the Fresno River just to stay all night, but a heavy rain started and the next day they just decided to remain. A story is told that may have been a reason for remaining - there was evidence of gold along the river bank. The Dennis family was with the Hensleys at this time. John Jackson Hensley and family made their home there. The children grew up and settled in various areas in and around the family home - some in Fresno County, but most of them not too far from the family home.



Before we get too involved in this story, let's get acquainted with "Major" or "Uncle Jack" or John Jackson Hensley. He married Margaret Murray of Cole County, Missouri in 1837. Her father was Judge Thomas Murray, who was prominent in the Missouri Legislature. The Murray family came to California with the Hensleys, but settled near Petaluma and engaged in farm pursuits.

John Jackson Hensley had nine children - six born in Missouri and three in California. The last two were girls - the youngest died at the age of five:

Thomas Jefferson  
Samuel Perry  
Abel (Abe, A. H. or Rev.)  
John M.  
Will C.  
Pinckney J.  
George Washington (Doc)  
Martha Ann  
Margaret Ann (who died at age five)

The first home of this family was located almost a quarter of a mile above where the Savage Monument was originally located. Later, they built their home very near the Hensley cemetery.

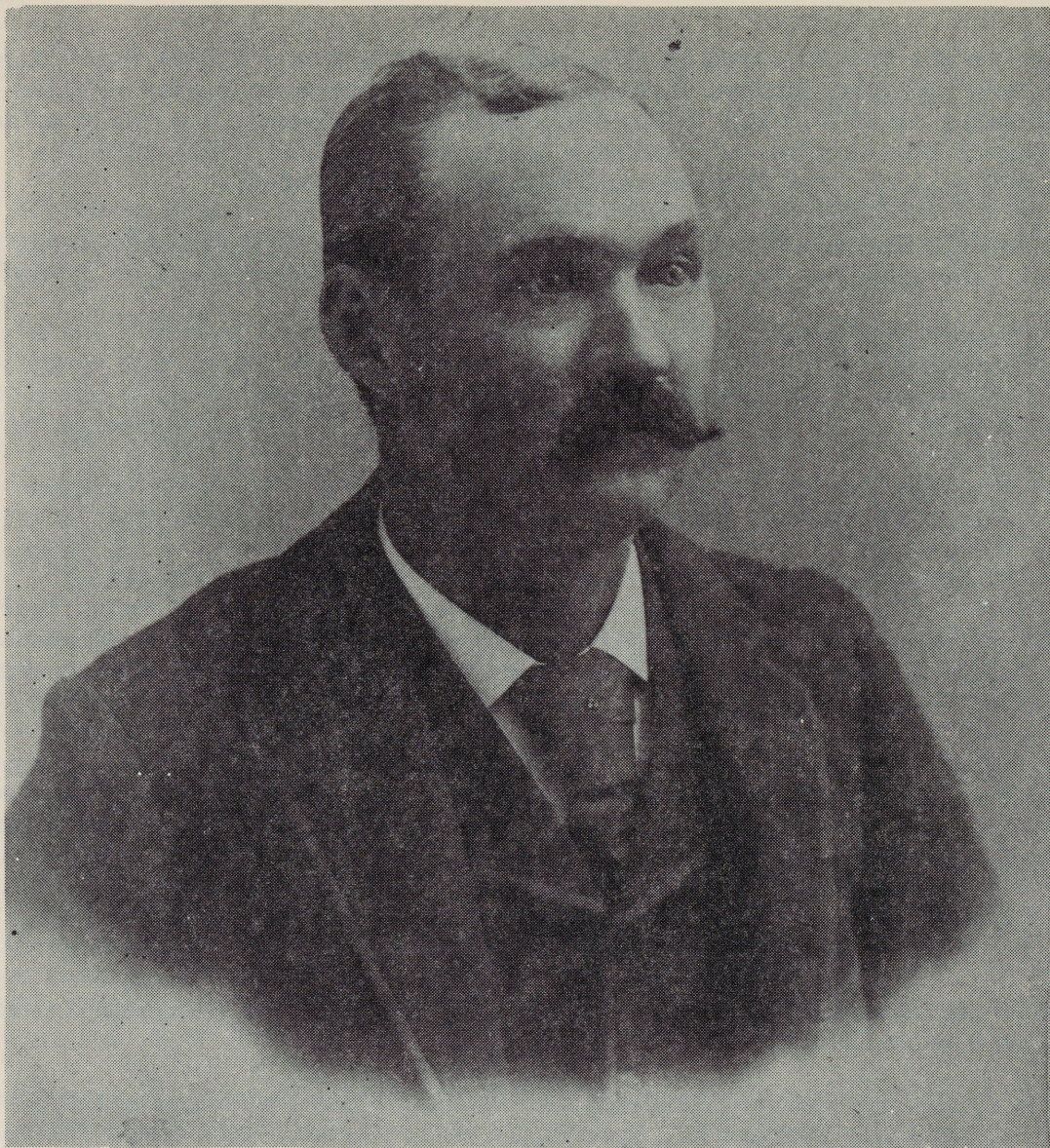
J. J. engaged in cattle raising. He purchased raw land along the Fresno River and lived in that same area until his death. He was a member of the Fresno County Board of Supervisors for one term. He was a Democrat. He filled a vacancy on the Board occasioned by the death of Isaac N. Ward, then ran for office the next year and was elected. J. J. Hensley was greatly interested in the community, its problems and possibilities, and while he stayed quite close to his home, he was involved in civic and lodge affairs and raised a fine family.

We will include brief stories of each of J. J.'s children - in some instances we do not have much information.

Thomas J. Hensley married Margaret Ann Dennis. They had eight children: Leroy, T. L., Will D., Charles H., Mrs. E. J. (Alice) Wood, Mrs. James (Ellie) Smith, and Mrs. Jack Daulton (Mary Frances), and one whose name is unknown. Their home was located on the south bank of the Fresno River, near the Hensley Bridge. This home became the home of Will (Uncle Bill), father of Andrew Hensley, who now lives in Madera. Mary Frances (Aunt Fannie) married Jack Daulton, son of Major Daulton. They bought the T. J. Hensley home from Will (or Uncle Bill.) Mrs. Thomas J. Hensley was a midwife and helped several children into this world - one was B. F. "Bud" Gaster.

A. H. (the Reverend or Abel) never married. He lived in the "old" home just a short distance from the Hensley cemetery where most of the family is buried. This cemetery, located about 400 yards from the old Hensley home, is cared for by some of the present day Hensleys. Abel H., or Reverend Hensley, was a self-taught minister and usually could gather enough members among his relatives and friends to hold captive for his quite lengthy sermons. He also loved to sing and often he could be heard long before he reached home, singing at the top of his voice. Frequently he rode a bicycle and used it to travel from place to place. He must have been quite well-known as a minister, since many obituaries of people from the Dennis, Raymond, Daulton, Wallace, Buchanan and Iron Mountain districts mentioned Rev. A. H. Hensley as the officiating minister. Each obituary ended or began with some poetry written by him.





JOHN M. HENSLEY

John M. Hensley came with his parents to what is now Madera County in 1862. He started out to earn his living at age 16. He worked for Jonathan Rea, a sheep raiser. Later, John M. made his first independent venture by raising sheep in Tulare County. He continued there until the memorable dry year of 1877. The drought caused the loss of 8000 head of sheep, out of 9500, and so injured him financially that he sold the balance of his flock. He returned to the old home on the Fresno River, where he secured contracts from Fresno County for keeping up the old Buchanan Road. He served for five years as constable of Madera township. John M. was very active in politics for the Democratic Party. In 1888, he was nominated and elected Sheriff of Fresno County, and began serving in January 1889. He moved to Fresno to assume these duties. He was re-elected and served as Fresno County Sheriff until 1893.

In those days, the Sheriff's office brought unusual responsibilities, even perils, for the "Daltons" were here, also the "Sontag" and "Evans" gang, committing constant depredations. John M. arrested Grant Dalton, but he escaped after being put in the Tulare County jail. The Daltons were chased out of the county and they went on to Oklahoma. John M. finished his term and became interested in sheep again. This led him to Wyoming, Montana and other parts of the West. He returned



to Madera in 1902 and continued to live there. He was appointed undersheriff in 1903.

John M. married Harriet R. Monroe from Woodville, California, a native of Missouri. They had five children: Etta (Mrs. A. L. Sayre), Walter J., Irving, Arthur, and Rea.

The seventh son, George Washington Hensley, often called "Doc," was born in Calaveras County, California, February 15, 1857. As soon as he was old enough, his interest turned to sheep raising in Tulare County, near Tipton. In the dry year of 1877, he lost all of his sheep. He returned to Madera and was foreman for the California Lumber Company until 1880, then he tried draying and hauling for two years. Later he ran the Club Stables, located where the first Fresno Auditorium stood. In 1888, he started boring wells and continued in this for thirty years. He dug the first well for irrigation and installed the first pumping plant in Fresno County. He bored the first oil well in the Kern River District, Kern County, for the Fresno-Bakersfield Oil Company. His brother Abel (Reverend) was George W.'s partner some of the time. George W. lived in Fresno in his later life.

George W. married Annie Pennington from Roseburg, Oregon. Her father crossed the plains with Marcus Whitman in the early 40's. They had six children: G. W., Jr., Warner, Elsie, Lillian, Harold, and May.

Samuel Perry had two daughters: Laura and Rose.

We have no information about Will C. - he died in 1905 or 1906.

Pinckney J. was undersheriff for a time in Madera County, but followed mining as a career. He was captured by the Indians when the family was coming to California - later escaped and finally located his parents in Madera County.

Martha Ann married Austin Mudgett - they made their home at Raymond, California.

Like the Daultons and Reas, two early Madera County families, the Hensleys repeated first names and initials, each generation. It is difficult to follow them unless you are well acquainted with the family. Also, they had nick-names by which many of them were known.

In the general area of the Fresno River where this family lived, many other families located: the Dennis, Gaster, Wood, Casuarang, and Luna families, to name just a few.

A school was built by James Dennis. The children went to this school awhile and then, because so many cattle were always grazing near the vicinity of the school, they moved the school up on the hill along the River Road. It remained the Dennis School until it closed. A Miss Matthews taught the first three months and then resigned, and Naomi Heiskell continued.

Soon this area around which much early Madera County history took place will be under water. It has been called the "Hidden" Dam for a long time. Many have wondered how the name "Hidden" Dam originated. Many stories are told, but the most reasonable seems to be that the original location for the dam was up the River in an area called "Windy Gap," somewhat secluded - hence "Hidden." This is just one old timer's version.



In June 1972, Dr. Franklin Fenenga headed an archaeological Field Party, sponsored by the California State University at Long Beach and employed by the National Park Service, to do research and excavation in the area of the Dam Site.

Mrs. Fenenga became very interested in this historical area, particularly the old Hensley home - in later years referred to as the A. H. Hensley home. Mrs. Fenenga and some of the research group made an intensive study of this old house, because it would soon be forgotten when the large bulldozers and other equipment started to prepare for dam construction. Mrs. Fenenga has presented to the Madera County Historical Society 23 pages of data related to this old Hensley home. In National Park Service records, the area around the Hensley Home is listed as Historic Site #25.



OLD HENSLEY HOME

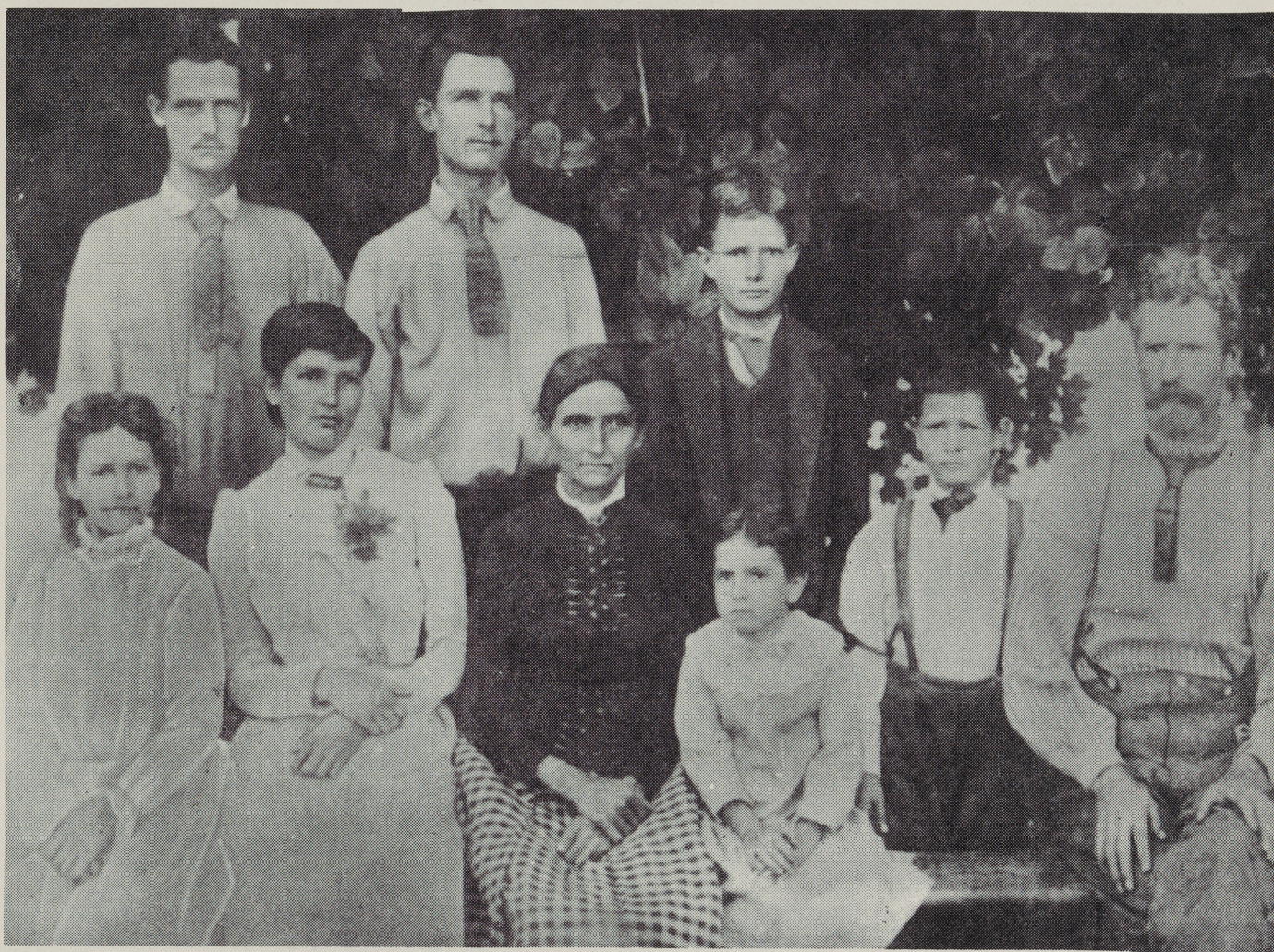
Mrs. Fenenga describes in detail the construction of this old home. She has made floor plans of each room, giving dimensions, etc., also describing the area around the old home. She found some evidence of the "old" home which was about 20 feet from the Hensley home.

She states that the most interesting feature of the house is the facade under the porch. The batten boards were covered with writing of names of members of the Hensley family, friends and neighbors who were a part of the local community, also visitors and ranch hands who were briefly a part of this household. With most of the names there is a date - the earliest reading "Walter Hensley, Madera, June 23, 1892." In June 1972, the California State University, Long Beach, Archaeological Field Party, employed by the National Park Service, removed the "facade" in the interest of preservation of the recorded names. These boards were given to the Madera County Historical Society. Mrs. Fenenga also included a list of the names and initials, dates, etc. recorded on these boards.





THOMAS JEFFERSON HENSLEY HOME



THOMAS JEFFERSON HENSLEY AND FAMILY



Sources of information:

1. Interviews with Andrew Hensley, Jewel Wilson, and Lorena Kemp, all fourth generation Hensleys, and B. F. Gaster.
2. History of Hidden Reservoir Area by William Scheidt, Fresno, California. 1966.
3. History and Biography of the State of California by Professor J. M. Quinn. 1905.
4. Contributions to California Archaeology No. 7 by William J. Wallace. 1970.
5. Excerpts from Madera and Fresno newspapers - 1902.
6. Document on the Hensley Home by Mrs. Franklin Fenenga - June 1972.

BOOKS REQUESTED AT ANNUAL MEETING

1. Madera County History by Charles Clough - \$2.95 + tax = \$3.10  
Presently on sale at Madera County Historical Society Office on Monday and Thursday afternoons.
2. Thunder in the Mountains by Hank Johnson. (Available soon)

CAN YOU HELP US?

1. Where was Grant's Sulphur Springs?
2. We have a request for information on William S. Chapman and the Chapman Ranch.
3. Any information on the Swastika Mine will be appreciated. It was not very far from the Polk School.

Mail information to Madera County Historical Society, P. O. Box 478, Madera, CA 93637

EARLY MADERAN HAD SENSE OF HUMOR

Mrs. Carey Answered

Back in the late 1800's, the old Southern Hotel, on the site of the present hotel of the same name (this is gone too), went up in smoke. The hotel was operated by an Irish lady, named Mrs. John Carey, who at the time of the fire was busy on the upstairs balcony throwing down bedding.

One of the roomers rushed up to her and asked if she had seen his telescope. Her reply was, as she continued throwing bedding to the street, "My good man can't you see the fire without a telescope?"

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This issue of the Madera County Historian, due to delay in publishing, is two in one. Beginning January 1973, the Madera County Historical Society will publish two Historians - one in April and one in October.

The Madera County Historian is 50¢ per copy and is included in membership in the Society.